INTRODUCTION

This study describes and discusses cultural changes that have taken place in rural North Korea under Communism, giving special attention to social changes. What notable changes have actually occurred? To what extent does the traditional culture survive, overtly and covertly, and what effects has it had in shaping modern conditions? To what degree has the modern population accepted Communist ideology? What, if any, have been the problems of adjustment to Communist life? These are some of the questions to which this study is addressed.

The division of the Korean peninsula following World War II resulted in the replacement of a single, homogeneous sociocultural system by two different systems, Communism in the northern half and anti-Communist capitalism in the south. Communism in North Korea is now more than a generation old, and so far the new system has suffered no serious setback on its way toward construction of an "ideal society." Students of North Korean Communism generally agree that after a quarter of a century of intensive experimentation, North Korea has emerged as one of the most radically changed and, at the same time, one of the most highly disciplined states in the world. Scholars have often asserted that fundamental, revolutionary changes have taken place in almost every aspect of the culture of North Korea. The precise nature of these changes is often not made clear or explicit, however, especially in matters of social relationships.

Certain changes that occurred after the introduction of Communism, such as the abolition of private ownership of means of producing goods, are well known to the rest of the world. This change alone would seriously weaken the foundation of the traditional society, which was largely based upon kinship. Similarly, collectivization of agricultural land alone would bring great changes, particularly in the realm of kinship. So also would mechanization of agriculture. We may reasonably assume that, sparked by economic and technological changes such as those cited above, a great many alterations occurred in the social order in general. We know, of course, that certain social changes were consciously planned. We may safely assume that many other changes have evolved without conscious planning — at least without farsighted planning — as the result of the interaction of old and new traits. This study thus necessarily concerns itself with economic developments, but its goals are broader. I intend to investigate and interpret

planned and unplanned cultural losses, gains, survivals, and adaptations, giving special emphasis to social changes, the subject about which our knowledge appears to be the smallest.

In order to discern what changes have actually been made in North Korea and to gain an understanding of the circumstances that have led to unplanned changes, I shall first describe traditional Korean culture and then turn to an examination of the contemporary culture of North Korea. These ethnographic data will help us to see how traditional elements and new traits have interacted. Some of the major features of Korean social organization that will be examined along the lines discussed above are described briefly in the following paragraph.

Traditional Korean society was familistic or kin-based. Kinship had been a dominant factor in all aspects of its social organization. Lineage members maintained strong solidarity, and when they shared an ancestor of historic prominence, solidarity was especially strong. Solidarity and integration of kin groups was supported particularly by property held in common. The Korean system of kinship relations had been strongly influenced by Chinese Confucianism. Kin terms were mainly derived from China, and the essence of Korean ancestor worship was prescribed by the Confucian ethical code. In traditional Korea, however, Confucianism was not the same as in China. Marked differences developed in the process of interaction with the native Korean culture. For example, in Korea the father-son relationship was the most highly valued among the "five human relationships." In China, however, all five relationships were ideally balanced, and, accordingly, the father-son relationship did not have pre-eminence over others. The emphasis in Korea on the father-son relationship and the allied development of exclusive lineages are obviously incompatible with a Communist revolution. One might expect, therefore, that under Communism these Confucian-derived elements would be either eliminated or substantially modified.

My study attempts to shed light on such questions regarding changes in social organization as are stated or implied in the preceding paragraph. In doing so, it deals mainly with rural North Korea, where I believe the traditional culture of pre-modern Korea was better preserved than in urban areas. Since I, a South Korean, could not conduct field research in North Korea, my study has depended principally upon information gathered from former North Korean Communists, people who once lived in North Korea under Communism, and foreigners who have visited North Korea. Use was also made of documents. Thus research techniques employed in gathering information were a combination of interviews and library research.

The primary and probably most valuable source of information was informants who had lived in North Korea as Communists for many years. In addition to the millions of refugees who left North Korea in the period

between the beginning of Communism and the end of the Korean War, hundreds of people later left for various reasons and now live in South Korea. These people may be divided into two groups: voluntary deserters and North Korean intelligence agents who subsequently surrendered to or were caught by South Korean governmental authorities and were allowed to live in South Korea after "rehabilitation." I conducted extensive interviews with five such informants during three and one-half months of field research in Seoul, Korea, during the summer of 1972. Among the five informants, all of whom were male, two were voluntary deserters and three were formerly North Korean intelligence agents. All had been citizens of North Korea for many years until their defection, which occurred between 1961 and 1969. At the time of their interviews, the informants ranged in age from 37 to 50 years and varied in familial social status, education, and occupation. One had a college degree and another was graduated from a technical school of junior college level. The others had received less formal education. Their occupations had been schoolteacher, military service (two, as officers), farm security agent, and party functionary. Since all left their families behind in North Korea, the identity of these informants is kept anonymous here to avoid the possibility of any punitive action against their relatives.

In addition to the information given by these five informants, I benefited from an interview with one of the latest arrivals from North Korea, an intelligence agent who was arrested in 1972 after six months of underground activity. This informant was born in Seoul, where his parents still reside. He was able to provide information concerning the most recent trends in North Korea.

Selection of these informants was made on the basis of their knowledge of the North Korean countryside and their availability. One informant provided valuable assistance in arranging for interviews with others. Since he is knowledgeable about the personal backgrounds of many ex-North Koreans, his advice was a key in the selection of other informants. Interviews took place mostly in hotel rooms and, to a lesser degree, in informants' homes or at their places of work.

Secondary sources used in this study are documents available in the United States, Korea, and Japan. Most of the works in question were published in North Korea and either were released by North Korean Communist officials or reached the outside world through other channels. Some publications that were used are observations of foreign visitors to North Korea. The most inportant source of the documents was the North Korean collection in the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., which is very extensive. Other sources include collections in the Tenri University Library, Tenri City, Japan, the Institute of Oriental Culture of Tokyo University, the Institute of Developing Economics, Tokyo, the Diet Library of Japan, Tokyo, and the Asiatic Research Center of Korea University, Seoul.

A word of caution about my sources of information is useful. Since actual field work in North Korea was impossible, it was also impossible to verify firmly all of the information given here. The informants tended to identify themselves as anti-Communists, apparently to avoid any possible suspicion of their continuing loyalty to Communism. By serving as informants, they wished to express their loyalty to the South Korean government, which they felt had saved their lives. The nature of this study, however, probably minimizes the possible bias of the informants. The interviews focused on factual ethnographic information on contemporary North Korea and gave little attention to ideological opinions, in which bias might be expected to be strong. The main concerns of the interviews were the things and events which the informants had seen and experienced while in North Korea, and efforts were made to reduce or identify bias or exaggeration. When information seemed questionable, attempts were made to verify or correct it by asking other informants. Except for some unique personal experiences, however, the data given by the informants showed little difference or variety in local customs throughout North Korea under Communism. Hardly any fundamental disagreements were found in the information gathered from informants of different backgrounds. A high degree of cultural uniformity seems to exist in North Korea.

Obviously, North Korean official publications have built-in biases, since their primary objectives are to disseminate information and to educate the people along Communist lines. These publications show no particular interest in reporting what is; rather, they emphasize what should be and what ought to be done. In order to win the support of the people, the publications give emphasis to accounts of how well the system works, rather than focusing on the way in which it operates. Some ethnographic studies have been made by official North Korean ethnologists (e.g., Hwang et al. 1960), but even in these studies emphasis has been given to newly-emerged socialist elements of culture and to what is yet to be changed, that is, to the remnants of the traditional "feudal" society. These ethnological studies provide governmental authorities with guidance for policy-making. When the Communist ethnologists conduct field research on rural society, they tend to choose either the most advanced cooperative farm available or the most backward one. Describing one extreme, they vaunt the "superiority" of the socialist system of cooperative economy, and in describing the other extreme they discern problems that remain to be solved. Of course, neither extreme is modal or typical of contemporary rural North Korean society. When we put information derived from Communist ethnological studies into the broad perspective of the full sociocultural system of North Korea, however, it can be properly understood. Let us suppose, for example, that these accounts consist of an attack on the "rain-calling" ceremony. In the past, it was common practice for the peasants to perform this rite when droughts occurred. Their

farming lacked adequate irrigation and was largely dependent upon rain, which they regarded as being under the control of supernatural beings. Although it is claimed by North Korean propaganda that farmers are no longer troubled by droughts because of the progress made in the development of irrigation systems, the attack on the rain-calling ceremony leads us to believe that this idea of supernaturalism is still alive. This interpretation does not necessarily mean that rain-calling actually or often happens in rural North Korea, but simply that the belief probably remains.

Thus the information collected from the North Korean sources used in this study may not be entirely accurate. It is quite possible that the Communist authorities have exaggerated the effectiveness of their system. Those who have visited North Korea are primarily sympathizers with the regime, whose travelogues would hardly be objective. Every effort has been made, however, to verify information by use of different sources. Interviews were directed largely toward information drawn from my preliminary library research. As noted earlier, no fundamental disagreement was found among the different sources. To some extent, it may be said that, in one way or another, every piece of information from these sources *does* reflect conditions in North Korea.

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